

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated for 2016-2017

The following categories were developed to guide use of the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children (SWVPP) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document:

- I. Collaborating with Community Partners
- II. Budget/Finance
- III. Enrollment/Eligibility
- IV. Assurances and Requirements
- V. Transportation

Each main category has subcategories listed in the left column to expedite locating content areas for questions.

I. Collaborating with Community Partners

Faith-Based Partners **Q1: Can a district contract with a faith-based agency to provide the SWVPP?**
A: Yes, school districts may partner with faith-based religious preschools for the provision of SWVPP as long as the faith-based agency meets the requirements of [281--Iowa Administrative Code 16](#), is located within the school district boundaries and as long as the SWVPP funding supports instruction that is "secular, neutral, and non-ideological."

- All faith-based partners must ensure that, from the time instruction supported by Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program funds starts until the time such instruction ends, no religious instruction takes place. There is to be no interruption (no "sprinkling") of such instructional time for any faith-based purpose. An arrangement with a faith-based entity or organization to provide statewide voluntary preschool programming shall not violate the following:
 - First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause (i.e., a child is not compelled to participate in any religious instruction or activity);
 - First Amendment's Establishment Clause (i.e., public funds are not used to support religious instruction).

Pursuant to Article I, Section 3 of the Iowa Constitution, religious instruction is restricted during the time that is funded through state dollars: "The general assembly shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; nor shall any person be compelled to attend any place of worship, pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing places of worship, or the maintenance of any minister, or ministry.

Q2: Is the faith-based preschool program required to remove non-secular icons (such as crosses or statues) from the classroom?

A: Non-secular icons may remain in the preschool classroom; however, these items may not be included in or alluded to during conversation or instruction during the hours of SWVPP.

**Community
Partners**

Q1: May a school district change the community partners identified in their application?

A: A district may add community partners, however, all programs must meet the assurances and requirements of Chapter 16. If a community partner chooses not to participate in the SWVPP, the district is to document the multiple attempts made to maintain the relationship.

Q2: Does a community partner need to be located within the district boundaries in order to collaborate to provide the SWVPP?

A: Yes, a community partner (private preschool/child care center, faith-based preschool or accredited nonpublic school) must be located within the district boundaries in order to participate with the district in the provision of the SWVPP.

Q3: When additional preschool programs (community or district-based) are added as part of the district's SWVPP, what are the time frames for meeting program requirements?

A: Newly added classrooms (community or district-based) are expected to meet the same assurances, requirements and standards as the programs included in the district's original application. Districts are encouraged to maintain and expand their community partnerships to increase access to quality preschool programs and to meet the needs of the community. As community partnerships increase, additional preschool programs will be receiving funds or have their children counted as part of the Certified Enrollment for SWVPP funds.

For example, if a district adds a preschool program in their second year, the program must immediately meet program standards, have a certified teacher, and meet all of the requirements and assurances if the district plans to count the children in this program on the Certified Enrollment count which must be certified by October 15. This would be the same as a district adding a section of first grade, they would meet the district requirements for a certified teacher and other requirements expected of an accredited school district.

II. Budget/Finance

**Intent of
Legislation
(HF 877)**

Q1: What is the intent of the SWVPP law and how can funds be used?

A: The intent of Chapter 16, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs for Four-Year-Old Children, is to create high-quality early learning environments for four-year-old children whose families choose to access such programs. The purpose of the SWVPP is to provide an opportunity for all young children in the state to enter school ready to learn by expanding voluntary access to quality preschool curricula

for all children (281-16.1, 82GA, HF877). To this purpose, state funds are made available to assist local school districts in the implementation of the SWVPP. Based on this guidance from the 2007 Iowa Acts, House File 877, Administrative Rules Chapter 16, and Administrative Rules Chapter 98, the school district is the recipient of the state aid and as such is held accountable for financial management. The intent of the legislation is that the funding would support a preschool program of high quality while increasing access to that program to all four-year-olds. The funding would then support the program through meeting the assurances and program requirements.

Receipt of Funds

Q1: Who is the recipient of funding through the SWVPP?

A: The funding is awarded to public school districts only. Funds are provided to school districts but they may contract with a licensed child care center or an existing public or private preschool program to coordinate community partnerships and preschool classrooms. All district and partnering preschool programs must comply with the requirements of IAC 281-16.

Use of Funds

For further information please review the [Finance FAQ](#).

Q1: What should the district's focus be when allocating funds for the SWVPP?

A: The focus should be on supporting the implementation of the SWVPP. Allocating funds to ensure that districts meet the assurances and program requirements, such as an appropriately licensed teacher, staff to child ratio, and meeting program standards will increase access and opportunity for four-year-olds to attend quality preschool programs. Funds allocated to support the implementation of quality preschool programs will successfully address the purpose of the legislation.

Child Count and Funding

Q1: What is the per child cost allocated to districts for the SWVPP?

A: Districts receive fifty percent of the state foundation aid based on the certified enrollment count from the previous year.

Q2: If a school district does not serve a child in the SWVPP this year, is the district able to count the child 1.0 when s/he attends kindergarten?

A: Yes. Children who are attending kindergarten are counted as 1.0 even if they did not participate in the SWVPP.

Q3: Can younger or older children participate in the SWVPP?

A: If space allows, a child who is younger or older than an eligible child (four years of age on or before September 15) may participate in the SWVPP; however, they will not count for state funding through the SWVPP nor can SWVPP funding be used for their participation in the preschool program.

III. Enrollment/Eligibility

Eligible Child

Q1: Who is eligible to participate in SWVPP?

A: A child may participate in the preschool program if s/he:

- Is a resident of Iowa; and
- Is four years of age on or before September 15 of the current school year.

Note: Children on an instructional service IEP may be included as part of a SWVPP but may not be counted as eligible children for funding purposes. See also **Q3** under the **Child Count and Funding** subheading.

Q2: Does the preschool program need to be available for children with special needs?

A: Yes. Federal guidelines (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act or IDEA-2004) require the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to be considered for every child eligible for special education services. The child may attend the preschool program, and would be included in the staff to child ratio and maximum class size, but would not be funded through the SWVPP (supporting funds would be provided through IDEA).

Q3: Are children on a support only IEP considered to be eligible children?

A: Yes. Children on a support only IEP are considered to be eligible children for the SWVPP. If they are four-years-old on or before September 15 they will generate the state funding. Support only services would include speech, occupational, or physical therapy, etc.

Q4: What should a district do if there are more families of four-year-old children wanting SWVPP and the district does not have room? Is the district obligated to start an additional preschool program?

A: No. The district is not obligated to begin an additional preschool program. Developing guidelines for registration and enrollment of four-year-olds for the preschool program would be a decision of the district with the advisement of the local advisory group. In addition, a district may use carry over funds to expand the program within the district or through community partnerships in an effort to address the waiting list.

Resident District

Q1: Does the child have to reside in the district which provides the preschool program?

A: No. An eligible child may attend preschool in any [district providing SWVPP](#).

Q2: Does open enrollment apply to the SWVPP?

A: No. Open enrollment applies to K-12 students only.

Q3: If a district does not have the space available to serve all children, may a district give priority to children who reside in the district (vs. children who reside in other districts)?

A: This is a local district decision. It is recommended that eligibility and selection criteria for registration and enrollment be reviewed by the school board and the advisory committee. This policy should be available to families interested in the program.

Iowa's administrative rules define an eligible child as a resident of Iowa and who is four-years-old on or by September 15 of the current school year. The SWVPP funding follows the child, regardless of the resident district.

Q4: Is the SWVPP voluntary for districts and families?

A: Yes, the SWVPP is voluntary for school districts and families. A district does not have to develop a preschool program. A family does not have to enroll their child in preschool. Preschool attendance is not required by state law. However, the child shall be considered to be of [compulsory attendance](#) age once enrolled.

IV. Assurances and Requirements

**Program
Standards**

Q1: What are the appropriate program standards for the SWVPP?

A: Three options for program standards include: Head Start Program Performance Standards, Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (IQPPS) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. The district selects one of the three options. However, in meeting some program planning needs, the district may adopt two program standards; for example, if the district partners with a Head Start program (must follow Head Start Program Performance Standards) and has a district building preschool (may follow Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards).

Q2: Is a private provider contracting with the school district required to adopt the same program standards as the school district?

A: This is not a requirement but a collaborative decision made at the local level. One of the three (3) program standards options must be in place.

**Maximum
Number of
Children**

Q1: What is the maximum number of children that can be in an SWVPP classroom?

A: There may be no more than 20 children in a classroom if adequate space is available (must have a minimum of 35 square feet of usable space per child). Districts are encouraged to plan for children on IEPs who may be integrated in the classroom at a later date. Children on IEPs are included in the total group size for the classroom.

Q2: May the district have more than 20 children in the session if there are additional adults?

A: No, there may be no more than 20 children in a session.

Q3: What is the maximum class size if there are 3-year-old children in the classroom?

A: If the majority of children are 3 years of age, the ratio and maximum number of children are determined by the program standard chosen. If the majority of children are 3-years-old, the IQPPS maximum number is 18 with 1 adult to 9 children.

**Adult to
Child Ratio**

Q1: What are the adult to child ratios?

A: *There must be at least one appropriately licensed teacher present for every 10 children in a classroom during the instructional time described in subrule 16.3(4). A minimum of one staff member and one teacher shall be present when 11 to 20 four-year-old children are present. Staff members shall have reasonable line-of-sight supervision of all children (281-16.3(2)).*

**Calendar/
Instructional
Time**

Q1: What is acceptable instructional time?

A: A minimum of 10 hours per week of instructional time is required in the SWVPP. As indicated in subrule 16.3(4) instructional time must be directly related to the program's curriculum and the Iowa Early Learning Standards. Instructional time should relate to intentional, planned teaching and learning experiences that would be reflected in the teacher's planning and lessons.

Q2: Is the preschool start date the same date as the district's first day of school for K-12?

A: Districts are encouraged to start their SWVPP within a reasonable time frame comparable to their existing school calendar to allow children to benefit from the preschool program and learning experiences. In order to accommodate the required home visits, districts may choose to start the SWVPP several days later than the K-12 start date.

Q3: How many days per year does the preschool have to provide instruction?

A: The number of days per year must be within the parameter of the school calendar days in session.

**Snack and/or
Meal**

Q1: The SWVPP schedule is from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00p.m. Is there any requirement that a meal would need to be provided?

A: Districts are encouraged to provide a minimum of one meal to children in the SWVPP. According to both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria and the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, a meal or snack must be served. Criterion 5.21 (IQPPS) states, "*The program serves meals and snacks at regularly established times. Meals and snacks are at least two hours apart, but not more than three hours apart.*"

**Teacher
Requirement
(licensure)**

Q1: Who employs the teacher?

A: The teacher may be employed by the district or contracted by the school district with another agency to provide instruction to children in a variety of settings. No matter whether the district employs the teacher or contracts with another agency for the services of a qualified preschool teacher, the district has the responsibility to

meet the requirements of [Iowa Code chapter 256c](#) and IAC 281-16 Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program Administrative Rules.

Q2: What qualifications does the SWVPP teacher need to have?

A: Preschool teachers must hold a valid practitioner's license issued by the Board of Educational Examiners under Iowa Code chapter 272 and hold endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners that includes prekindergarten. There is no requirement that the teacher be an employee of the district; the teacher may be employed by a private provider or other public agency with whom the district has entered into an agreement or contract under Iowa Code chapter 28E. Contact the Board of Educational Examiners for specific teacher information at the following Website: <http://www.boee.iowa.gov/>

Appropriate teaching endorsements are:

- Teacher Endorsement #100 -- Prekindergarten through grade three, including special education;
- Teacher Endorsement #103 – Prekindergarten through kindergarten; and
- Teacher Endorsement #106 – Prekindergarten through grade three.

A Class B conditional license is also an appropriate license if it is for PK-3 including special education or PK-K. If teachers do not hold one of these endorsements they should apply to BOEE for a conditional license.

Note: A teacher who has an Early Childhood Teacher – Special Education 15.2 (19) endorsement (also known as #223) is not appropriately licensed to teach in the SWVPP because the endorsement does not include preschool general education. The teacher may apply to the Board of Educational Examiners for a Class B conditional license in one of the acceptable teaching endorsement areas listed above.

Q3: If a district contracts with another agency to provide the SWVPP, is the district required to evaluate the teacher? Does Chapter 284 apply?

A: The district is responsible to evaluate the district employees only. If a district does not employ the teacher but instead contracts or develops an agreement with another agency to provide the preschool teacher, that agency is responsible for the supervision and evaluation of the teacher. In such case, Chapter 284 does not apply. The district is not required to evaluate a teacher employed by a community partner.

Q4: If the teacher is an employee of the school district, who evaluates the teacher?

A: The district employee with an Evaluator Endorsement through the Board of Educational Examiners evaluates the teacher employed by the district, regardless of where instruction is provided.

Q5: If the community partner employs and evaluates the teacher, is the supervisor required to hold an Evaluator Endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners?

A: It is not a requirement of the community partner supervisor evaluating the teacher to hold an Evaluator Endorsement from the Board of Educational Examiners.

Q6: What are the requirements for a preschool teacher who is not employed by a school district to convert the initial license to a standard license?

A: The teacher should contact the Board of Educational Examiners for information on license conversion at <http://www.boee.iowa.gov/>.

Q7: What collaboration responsibilities does the teacher have?

A: The teacher must

- **collaborate** with other partners as necessary. Partners may include family support/parent education staff, community child care, Early Childhood Iowa (Community Empowerment), Head Start, Shared Visions, and others as necessary to adequately meet the needs of the child and family.
- **develop** and maintain a relationship with the child's family in order to increase the potential of the child and family including collaboration with necessary family service/education providers.
- **assist** families to identify and access available resources to meet the needs of the child.

Professional Development

Q1: Are districts required to provide professional development to SWVPP teachers?

A: Yes, districts shall ensure appropriate professional development is provided to district SWVPP teachers as addressed in the career development plan. Professional development must be specific to early childhood and must also be offered to community partner teachers.

Q2: How many hours of professional development should a district provide?

A: It is recommended that the district provide a minimum of 15 hours per year of professional development.

Q3: Are teacher associates in the SWVPP required to participate in professional development?

A: Yes, the district must ensure that all district SWVPP staff receive appropriate professional development in early childhood education.

Curriculum

Q1: What are the curriculum requirements for the SWVPP?

A: Not all SWVPP classrooms are required to use the same curriculum. A district must use a curriculum with a research or evidence-based written framework that is comprehensive, addresses the needs of the whole child, and provides a guide for decision making about content, instructional methods, and assessment. Examples include, but are not limited to, Creative Curriculum and High Scope.

The curriculum must meet the identified program standards (National Association for the Education of Young Children Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, Iowa's Quality Preschool Program Standards, or Head Start Program Performance

Standards), must be research or evidence-based, and must align with the Iowa Early Learning Standards. The benefits of districts using the same curriculum across all preschool classrooms include teachers working together to align instruction with the Iowa Early Learning Standards, planning for instruction, and attending cohesive professional development to enhance teaching and learning.

Q2: What does research or evidence-based mean?

A: Research-based means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.

Evidence-based means research that can be classified as “promising” under certain conditions. First, if a research design is weak but findings have been consistent across multiple replications, the treatment under study can be said to have promise. Second, if single strategies that have been studied under true experimental conditions are combined with multiple strategies, practices, and routines and the composite then studied with a weaker design with positive results, the findings can be classified as promising.

Assessment

Q1: What are the assessment requirements?

A: Districts are required to assess all preschool children with the GOLD online assessment and maintain local agreements with *Teaching Strategies* under Iowa’s *GOLD* State Umbrella Agreement. Iowa Code 279.60 was amended in 2013 to include the GOLD assessment for every resident prekindergarten or four-year-old child whose parent or guardian enrolls the child in the district. This includes any preschool-aged child enrolled by a parent in a district program. Examples include three-year old, four-year old, and mixed age classrooms, as well as those in which a child receives early childhood special education services. It also includes any community based early childhood program that receives Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program funding.

Any Iowa program not required to use GOLD online per the above guidance, including home and center based child care, may participate in the GOLD online assessment under Iowa’s *GOLD* State Umbrella Agreement, which allows for a reduced per child cost.

Families

Q1: Do families need to be involved in SWVPP programming?

A: Yes, family participation is vital to their child’s preschool success. The SWVPP must involve families in at least one home visit, one family night, and a minimum of two family-teacher conferences annually. Family involvement may include volunteering in the classroom, orientation to the preschool program, parent education, general communications, and other activities (IAC 281-16.3(12)).

Q2: What are the requirements for Family Night?

A: This is a local decision that should be made with the input from the local advisory group, including parents if possible. It is not recommended that districts use Open House or Meet the Teacher events to meet this requirement. Some ideas

may include events such as Family Literacy Night, Family Math Game night, Family Art Project Night, cookie decorating night, a literacy tea party, a family picnic, etc. Ideas should be generated based on input from the advisory group and specific to the needs of local communities.

Q3: Does the home visit need to take place in the home?

A: It is the expectation that the home visit occurs in the home. The home visit provides an opportunity for the teacher to become acquainted with and learn from the family about their family structure, preferred child-rearing practices, and information families wish to share about their socioeconomic, linguistic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The visit provides an opportunity for staff to learn about the family's priorities and hopes for their child. It also provides an opportunity to learn about the child within the family context. It is intended for the teacher to meet the child and family in a familiar environment so the child has a comfortable adjustment to the school.

After an attempt to schedule a home visit if a family expresses a preference to meet at an alternate location this should be honored. With the prior reviewed purposes in mind, the school setting is not the preferred setting for conversation and learning about the child and family. The home visit should occur in a setting in which the family is comfortable or a neutral location may be considered such as a library coffee house, or even a park. School districts also need to ensure the safety of their staff in determining the location and timing of the home visit.

Q4: The rules require that a teacher make a home visit at least once a year – can this be combined with a conference at the school?

A: No, conferences are a time for teachers and families to discuss the preschool program and the child's learning and progress. The purpose of the home visit is to help the teacher learn about the child and the family. The location should be where the family is comfortable; this could be the home, the public library, a coffee shop; but preferably not the school setting. The focus of the home visit is to share information, and allow the teacher to understand the child within the context of their family. See question 3 above.

Q5: Is a district required to develop a parent handbook for SWVPP?

A: It is recommended that the district and community partners develop a common parent handbook for the SWVPP. A parent handbook is helpful in clarifying roles and responsibilities for families and the district. Districts may consider how their current parent handbook may be edited to include the necessary elements to address the SWVPP and the adopted program standard.

V. Transportation

Bussing

Q1: Do school buses need to have safety restraints for four-year-olds?

A: The DE provides guidance regarding the safe transportation of children. See the following website for further information on transportation

http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=2147

For additional questions about the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, contact Jennifer Adkins (jennifer.adkins@iowa.gov) or 515-725-2219.